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CHANTEYS AND BALLADS

SEA-CHANTEYS · TRAMP-BALLADS AND OTHER BALLADS AND POEMS

BY

HARRY KEMP

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CHANTEYS AND BALLADS

SEA-CHANTEYS, TRAMP-BALLADS AND OTHER BALLADS AND POEMS

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CHANTEYS AND BALLADS

SEA-CHANTEYS, TRAMP-BALLADS AND OTHER BALLADS AND POEMS

BY

HARRY KEMP

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
PUBLISHERS

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THE·PLIMPTON·PRESS
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DEDICATED TO

RICHARD LEGALLIENNE

WHO HAS DEVOTED A LIFE-TIME OF ARTISTRY TO THE

MAINTENANCE OF THE HIGH TRADITION

OF ENGLISH SONG

IN bringing out these poems in book form acknowledgments are due to the following magazines: *Adventure*, *Ainslee's*, *The Century*, *Collier's*, *The Daily Citizen* (London), *Everybody's*, *The Forum*, *The International*, *The Independent*, *House and Garden*, *Live Stories*, *McClure's*, *Munsey's*, *The Masses*, *The New Review*, *The Parisienne*, *The People's Magazine*, *The Popular Magazine*, *The Quill*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Snappy Stories*, *The Smart Set*, *Telling Tales*, *The Thrill Book*, *The Twentieth Century Magazine*.

TO MY READERS

IT was in my youth and my early twenties, at a time when I was thoroughly mad for life and whetted keen in every nerve for picaresque adventure and a man's romance at sea, that I went through the varied experiences from which finally sprang these songs and ballads.

For it was not till long after I had left off going to sea and tramping on land that I gained the power to give them forthright expression in song. The tumult and reality were too near me as yet. I had not acquired the necessary perspective. I could as soon have cut my heart out and held it up for people to look at, as have sung them then. Now, and only after years of comparative settling down, have my experiences ripened into maturity and achieved the incarnation of the present word.

Since those days of tramping and of sea-life, my mode of existence has immeasurably changed. So much so that at times my former life seems only a far dream, or something I must have imagined.

All the technicalities of ships and things have dropped through my mind into a forgetting as through a net that holds only big fish and lets the little escape . . . the unimportant has been lost, the everlasting aspects remain. . . .

TO MY READERS

For still the Shine and Heave of the sea itself overpowers me the same as of old — the beloved ocean pouring in tremendously from all its four horizons. Again I feel the way seamen feel and act. Again there comes to me the breathing night full of gulfs of over-leaning stars . . . those wide dawns and sunsets with no land in sight, that are a spiritual experience in themselves . . . again there comes to me richly the strange, inarticulate growth of soul and heart and mind that intimate experience of sea and sky brings to them who learn and love the life of those who go down to sea in ships . . . again I find the immortal meaning of it all. . . .

Rolling freights, jails, vermin, ships at sea, rough fo'c'sle companionships, — I am gladder for these things than for all that I have since learned from classrooms and from books. . . .

For only when a chap is down to the buff and hanging on to the ragged edge of things does he get glimpses, through peep-holes of hard work, suffering, and humility, into men's naked souls.

As for my chants and ballads out of the Bible, a word of explanation will suffice: once when I was being held over in jail for a fairly extended period, for a crime which I did not commit (which is neither here nor there) . . . at a time

when I was tramping — I had an only book with me, a Bible. And I found it a real live book, full of men and women who had the color of the earth in their words and lives and thoughts. Possessing this Bible not through piety but by accident, I found power and poetry in those old shepherds and prophets and kings that move and breathe in its pages. . . .

And Christ walking about Judea, along the roads, and from inn to inn, somehow got into my soul, together with his honest fishermen-apostles . . . and so the New Testament Life, as well as that of the Old, also became a part of actual contemporary life for me, just as much as the campfires I sat about or the other tramps I consorted with.

HARRY KEMP

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CHANTEYS

THESE are the songs that we sing with crowding feet,
Heaving up the anchor chain,
Or walking down the deck in the wind and the sleet
And in the drizzle and rain.

These are the songs that we sing beneath the sun,
Or under the stars of night,
And they help us through with the work to be done
When the moon climbs into sight.

These are the songs that tell our inmost hopes
While we pull and haul a-main,
The bo'sun booming as we lean with the ropes,
And we, bringing in the refrain.

FO'C'SLE COMRADESHIP

THERE'S not much in the fo'c'sle of a ship
But old seaboots and chests that stand in rows
While up above a smoky lantern glows,
And hanging from their pegs the oilskins drip.
Sometimes in storms the water washes in;
Sometimes we stifle for a breath of air;
Yet somehow comradeship gets being there
And common hardship makes the stranger kin. . . .
Blood-brothers we become, but not in peace, —
Still ready to exchange the lie and blow;
Just like the sea our quarrels rise and cease:
We've never a dull moment down below. . . .
But set upon us in a tavern brawl
You'll find that you will have to fight us all.

A SEAMAN'S CONFESSION OF FAITH

As long as I go forth on ships that sail
The mighty seas, my faith, O Lord, won't fail;
And while the stars march onward mightily
In white, great hosts, I shall remember Thee;
I have seen men one moment all alive,
The next, gone out with none to bless or shrive
Into the unseen place where all must go, —
So, Lord, thy mercy and thy gifts I know. . . .
They think me Godless, maybe, but indeed
They do not see how I have read thy creed
In flowing tides and waves that heave and run
Beyond the endless west where sinks the sun;
In the long, long night-watches I have thought
On things that neither can be sold nor bought,
Rare, priceless things; nor have I scorned nor scoffed
At thy sure might, when lost in storms aloft:
The prayer and faith of seamen will not fail
O God, my God, as long as ships do sail.

THE REMEDY

WHEN you've failed with ordered people,
when you've sunk neck-deep again
In the sluggish wash and jetsam of the slackened
tides of men,
Don't get old and mean and bitter, — there's
a primal remedy —
Just take a ship to sea, my lad, just take a
ship to sea.

There are shipmen grey and agèd but still full
of ancient mirth,
And they drew their joy of living, not from
rooting in the earth,
But from striking out forever with a sail that's
never furled
And by seeing all the oceans and the wonder
of the world;
In the dim, Phœnician days and in the wild
sea-times of old
Do you think they only voyaged for the red of
shining gold?
No, they slid beyond the sky-line for they felt
it good to be
On a ship that tramped with thunder down the
highways of the sea.

When you've drunk the lees of failure, when
you've fought and never won,
When you've cursed the stale recurrence of the
certain, weary sun
And the daily, fruitless struggle pledging youth
for usury,
Come, and cast the world behind you, and
take ship for open sea;

All you'll need will be your dunnage and your
knife upon your hip,
And you'll find a bunk that waits you in the
fo'c'sle of a ship,
And you'll find the wind about you and the
everlasting sky
Leaning huge from four horizons as the flying
scud blows by —
And you'll find the ancient healing, ever waiting,
ever free,
That all men have found forever in the sailing
of the sea.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A SHIP AT SEA

THREE SONGS OF SHIPS

THERE'S nothing like a ship at sea with all
her sails full-spread
And the ocean thundering backward 'neath her
mounting figurehead
And the bowsprit plunging starward and then
nosing deep again.
"There's nothing like a ship at sea," sing ho,
ye sailormen.

Oh, a little wayside tavern is a jolly thing to know
Where there's mugs and waiting tables and an
open fire a-glow;
And it's good to have a song to sing at work as
well as play;
And it's pleasant to have memories of boy-
hood's yesterday;
And they say a tried companion walking down
an endless road
Makes the heavy footfall lighter, shares the
burden of the load. . . .
And I see my sweetheart walking with her head
held proud and high
And I wish that I was with her where the bells
ring in the sky. . . .

But there's nothing like a ship at sea with all
her sails full-spread
And the ocean thundering backward 'neath
her mounting figurehead.
Oh, it's once you be a sailor you must go to sea
again.
"There's nothing like a ship at sea," sing ho,
ye sailormen.

A SHINING SHIP

HAVE you ever seen a shining ship
  Riding the broad-backed wave,
While the sailors pull the ropes and sing
  The chantey's lusty stave?

Have you ever gazed from a headland's reach
  Far out, into the blue,
To glimpse, at first a flashing mote
  That to a tall ship grew,

A full-sailed ship on the great, broad sea
  Heel-down and bearing home
All the romance from Homer's days
  To now, across the foam?

For, purple-white in rippling dusks,
  Or edged with sunset's fire, —
Behold, each ship is a phantom ship
  That bears the World's Desire! . . .

O merchant, merchant seeking wares
  That tip full-laden beams,
The Living God has made your fleets
  His argosies for dreams,

Far-riding argosies that go
With bearded men and strong
To the world's ends for merchandise
And come back — bearing Song!

Legends and songs of Happy Isles
And fairy realms a-far
Beyond the windless gates of dawn
And the white morning star!

GOING DOWN IN SHIPS

GOING down to sea in ships
  Is a glorious thing,
Where up and over the rolling waves
  The seabirds wing;

Oh, there's nothing more to my heart's desire
  Than a ship that goes
Head-on down through marching seas
  With streaming bows;

Would you hear the song of the viewless winds
  As they walk the sky?
Come down to sea when the storm is on
  And the men stand by.

Would you see the sun as it walked abroad
  On God's First Day?
Then come where dawn makes sea and sky
  A gold causeway.

Oh, it's bend the sails on the black cross-yards
  For the day dies far
And up a windless space of dusk
  Climbs the evening star. . . .

Now there's gulf on foaming gulf of stars
  That lean so clear
That it seems the bastions of heaven
  Are bright and near

And that, any moment, the topmost sky
  May froth and swim
With an incredible bivouac
  Of seraphim. . . .

O wide-flung dawn, O mighty day
  And set of sun! . . .
O all you climbing stars of God,
  Oh, lead me on! . .

Oh, it's heave the anchor, walk and walk
  The capstan 'round —
Far out I hear the giant sea's
  World-murmuring sound!

THE SHIP OF DREAMS

SHIP drawing furrows of following foam
Leaning down shoreward out of the sky,
What are the dreams you are carrying home,
What are the dreams that you bring us to buy?
"You may purchase your fill, you may have what you will"
The Great Ship, leaning, made her reply,

"For I bear all cargoes here in my hold
As down the ways of the sky I dance,
Chests of ebony, plates of gold,
The High Adventure, The Great Romance,
The One True Love that you've long dreamed of,
The Single Throw Of The Dice Of Chance;

The Riches you seek and the Fame you've pursued,
The Joy of the Sweet, Vine-Trellised Cot,
And every dream wherewith you've endued
The hopes of Man in his earthly lot,
But in the end, my friend, my friend,
You've got to pay for the Dream you've sought."

The Ship swept on like a moving cloud
In tier on tier of heavenly white,
Singing with great winds, thunder-bowed,
The joy of the ocean, the waves' delight,
While climbing high in the rocking sky,
Her mariners went up, small, from sight. . . .

Then the people came crowding from field and
town
To see the Ship of Their Dreams come in,
Through highway and byway pouring down
They made a noise like a market's din,
The Rich and The Poor, The Gentle and Boor,
The Glad and The Sad, The Fat and The Thin:

For there's never a person but has his dream
Or who has not sent his heart a-far
Where the moving hills of the Ocean gleam
Beyond the reach of the harbour-bar
Whence the day is born, a-new, each morn
Preceded by the morning star. . . .

The traffic of unlading began,
From the holds' last depths the merchandise
came;
They crowded closer, woman and man,
Each answering to his echoed name:
And they bore away, the Sad and the Gay,
Their bundles of woe and joy and shame.

The Poet got his fame — and his crust,
The Statesman achieved his empty height,
The Miser clutched his ignoble dust,
The Conqueror's crown, it shone so bright
That his eyes were blind to the storm behind
And the pit that yawned at his feet forth-
right. . . .

Now rose a wailing that grew and grew,
"Nay, this is not as our hope did seem;
We have gained a thing we never knew!"
Then answered a Voice, "Aye, so ye deem? . . .
Yet to each, as he lives, the Captain gives, —
And for the Dream, The Reward Of The Dream! . . ."

And yet full many were jocund there,
And, singing, bore their burdens away,
For they knew that the Captain had trafficked fair,
And they had no word of cavil to say —
As away from the rout the Ship drew out
Till it hung, like a star, on the edge of the day.

A WHALER'S CONFESSION

THREE long years a-sailing, three long years a-whaling,
Kicking through the ice floes, caught in calm or gale,
Lost in flat Sargasso seas, cursing at the prickly heat,
Going months without a sight of another sail.

I've learned to hate the Mate, and I've always cursed the Captain.
I hate the bally Bo'sun, and all the bally crew, —
And, sometimes, in the night-watch, the long and starry night-watch,
Queer thoughts have run wild in my head — I've even hated you!

You, that have been my shipmate for fifteen years of sailing,
From Peru to Vladivostock, from England to Japan. . . .
Which shows how months of sailing, when even pals go whaling,
Can get upon the bally nerves of any bally ma

I'm glad our nose points homeward, points home
again to Bristol, —
I'm glad for Kate who's waiting, far down a
little lane:
I'll sign her for a long cruise, a longer cruise
than this one,
And seal the bargain like a man, before I
sail again.

Yes, I will still go sailing; yes, I will still go
whaling:
I've done a lot of thinking along of love and
hate. . . .
For signing on a woman's a cruise that lasts a
lifetime —
And I'd rather hate a hundred crews than
take to hating Kate!

Three long years of whaling . . . yes, a life-
time sailing,
Kicking through the ice floes, caught in calm
or gale,
Lost in flat Sargasso seas, cursing at the prickly
heat,
Going months without a sight of another
sail!

THE GIRL THAT MARRIED ANOTHER MAN

OH, it's easy come and it's easy go
With most of the little girls I know, —
  Haul away, my bullies;
And when you come, and when you part,
They never take it deep to heart, —
  Haul away, my bullies.
Oh, there was Martha, at Liverpool,
She never heard of the Golden Rule, —
  Haul away, my bullies;
And there was Gulla, the Temple Girl,
And Minnie, and Marie, and Pearl, —
  Haul away, my bullies,
In Rotterdam, Marseilles, Orleans, —
And each of 'em taught me what love means;
  Haul away, my bullies . . .
But there is a girl that stands apart,
I can never get her out of my heart, —
  Haul away, my bullies;
OH, I TRY TO FORGET, BUT I NEVER CAN,
THE GIRL THAT MARRIED ANOTHER MAN —
  Haul away, my bullies!

THE DOLDRUMS

A STILL-LIFE PICTURE

THE sails hang dead, or they lift and flap
like a cornfield scarecrow's coat,
And the seabirds swim abreast of us like ducks
that play, a-float,
And the sea is all an endless field that heaves
and falls a-far
As if the earth were taking breath on some
strange, alien star,
For there are miles and miles of weed that
tramp around and 'round
Till a fellow's tempted to step out and try if
it's the ground.
And, sometimes, when we strike a space that's
clear of wild sea-grass
Our faces look up true and smooth as from a
looking glass —
For unwrinkled as a baby's smile the ocean lies
about
And a pin would break in ripples if we only
cast one out. . . .
But the skipper isn't happy for there's not a
wind that blows, —
And beware the Mate's belaying pin as up the
deck he goes,
For the ship, she's rolling, rolling like a nigger
on a spree

And the cargo's almost shifted as we wallow
in the sea
Because, out somewhere miles away a storm
is waking hell. . . .
And up smooth lifts of bubbling weed we ride
the rolling swell. . . .
Oh, each inch of us is crawling with the itch of
prickly heat;
We can hear our own blood throbbing like a
Chinese tom-tom's beat
And we catch a voice that's lifted, though it
hardly seems in prayer —
It's the poor old cook that's cursing in the
boiling galley there. . . .
Oh, the region of the doldrums, for the devil it
was made
And all decent seamen hate it as they pray for
winds of trade
As they flounder toward the trade-winds where
the sails lift full and free
And once more the prow runs onward foaming
through the open sea.

GOOD–BYE!

A CHANTEY TO BE SUNG AT THE CAPSTAN

GOOD–BYE to Dirty Kate's saloon
(Walk 'er round)
As we slither past the last sand dune.
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound).

Good-bye to all our friends in town
(We're outward bound)
Our FRIENDS — while we had half a crown.
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound)

Good-bye to the rum that scrapes like wire,
(Walk 'er round)
And whiskey with its claws of fire.
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound)

Good-bye to the gravestones on the hill
(We're outward bound)
Above the town where we got our fill —
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound)

Our fill of the kind that cry "give, give!"
(Walk 'er round)
Of the people that say "we've got to live!"
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound). . . .

Good-bye, till we come to get trimmed again;
(We're outward bound)
For it's always the way with sailormen!
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound)

For there's something about this going to sea
(Walk 'er round)
That makes a fellow big and free.
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound)

So lean on your bars and walk 'er round
(We're outward bound)
There's a good stiff wind, and we're outward bound! . . .
Thank God, boys, we're outward bound!
(Walk 'er round
We're outward bound)

THE CHANTEY OF THE COOK

DITHYRAMB OF A DISCONTENTED CREW

THE Devil take the cook, that old, grey-bearded fellow,
Yo ho, haul away!
Who feeds us odds and ends and biscuits whiskered yellow.
(And the home port's a thousand miles away.)

The Devil take the cook, that dirty old duffer,
Yo ho, haul away!
Each day he makes the captain fatter and bluffer,
(But we'll have to eat hardtack for many a day).

The ship-biscuit's mouldy and the spuds we get are rotten,
Yo ho, haul away!
And the tinned goods that's dished up is seven years forgotten,
Yo ho, haul away!

And each, in his heart, has marked the cook for slaughter,
(And it won't do him any good to pray).
For the coffee's only chickery half-soaked in luke-warm water,
Yo ho, haul away!

It's put on your best duds and join the delegation;
Yo ho, haul away!
We're aft to ask the captain for a decent ration,
(And to drop the cook at Botany Bay. . . .)

Look here, you cabin boy, what has set you laughin'?
Yo ho, haul away!
Don't tell us no lies or we'll clout your ears for chaffin',
For we're not a lot of horses that can live on hay.

What's this you're tellin'? Is it plum duff and puddin'?
Yo ho, haul away!
Why not make it roast beef and let it be a good 'un?
For plum duff and rum's not a feast for every day.

Oh, it ain't the cook's fault that we EAT one day in seven.
Yo ho, haul away!
It's the owners of the ship, — may they never get to heaven
(No matter how hard they pray).

It's the owners of the ship that give us meat that's yellow,
Yo ho, haul away!
And after all the cook's a mighty decent fellow
(Though we'll have to eat rotten grub for many a day).

O Lord up in heaven, when THEIR souls and bodies sever,
Yo ho, haul away!
May the owners squat in hell gnawing at salt-horse forever
And the grub that they give us every day. . . .

Excepting for one thing, O Lord God in heaven,
Yo ho, haul away!
Don't let them have no plum duff one day in seven,
(*All together with great vigor*)
But forever and forever and unto eternity the truck that we're fed on every day, Amen!

AT SEA I LEARNED THE WEATHER

AT sea I learned the weather,
  At sea I learned to know
That waves raged not forever,
  Winds did not ever blow.

I learned that, 'mid the thunder,
  Was nothing might avail
But lying to and riding
  The storm with scanted sail,

Knowing that calm would follow
  Filled full of golden light
Though hail and thunder deafened
  The watches of the night.

And, now today I'm sailing
  The changing seas no more,
But tied up to a woman
  And snug and safe ashore,

With pipe and 'baccy handy
  And Sal still loving me —
I tell you that I'm thankful
  For things I learned at sea!

CLIPPER DAYS

A SONG FROM SNUG HARBOUR

An Old Sailor to A Young One

I AM eighty year old and somewhat,
  But I give to God the praise
That they made a sailor of me
  In the good old Clipper Days

When men loved ships like women,
  And going to sea was more
Than signing on as deckhand
  And scrubbing a cabin floor,

Or chipping rust from iron
  And painting . . . and chipping again. . . .
In the days of Clipper Sailing
  The sea was the place for *men:*

You could spy our great ships running
  White-clouded, tier on tier;
You could hear their trampling thunder
  As they leaned to, racing near;

And it was "heigh and ho, my lad,"
  And "we are outward bound," —
And we sang full many a chantey
  As we walked the capstan round,

And we sang full many a chantey
  As we drove through wind and wet
To the music of Five Oceans
  Ringing in my memory yet. . . .

Go drive your dirty freighters
  That fill the sky with reek, —
But we — we took in sky-sails
  High as a mountain-peak;

Go, fire your sweaty engines
  And watch your pistons run, —
We had the winds to serve us,
  The living winds, my son,

And we didn't need propellers
  That kicked a mess about,
But we hauled away with chanteys
  Or we let the great sails out. . . .

And I'm eighty year old and somewhat —
  And I give to God the praise
That they made a sailor of me
  In the good old Clipper Days!

THE STEAMBOAT SAILOR'S REPLY

I CAN'T talk back to you, Daddy, but give me a word or two:
Things change, and the world goes onward, and there's always something new
In spite of the Wise King's saying (to God be all the praise),
And men still seek out new things and search for better ways.

I grant there's nothing finer than a full-rigged ship at sea
With the rising moon behind her, or the sinking sun a-lee,
But there's also naught surpasses the unceasing engine room
Where the harnessed fire and lightning pushes onward through the gloom
And the living rods and pistons plunge with a continued might
While a hundred golden port-holes go a-sweeping down the night, —
And the furnaces, red-flaring, with the small, black shapes close by
Of the men that feed their hunger: let the Strength of Them reply! . . .

We don't roll and wait the wind's will, nay, we
go our constant ways
Where you lay, becalmed and cursing, in those
Good Old Clipper Days;
We go trailing smoky banners round the world
and back again;
Tide and wind, they wait upon us and obey the
will of men.
With the strength of many horses now the
milky-turning screw
Beats the wave-bulk to submission as we lift
and thunder through;
Head-on to the wind we labour, we defy the
tempest's will
Where you rode bare-stripped, or waited for the
hollow sails to fill;
We make ports you never thought of, we hail
coasts you never knew,
We go ramming up wide rivers like an ocean
to the view,
We go in and out of islands where the reefs lie
under hand, —
We began the Great Surrender of the Wind to
Man's Command,
When big wing-spread ships will wander down
the reaches of the clouds,
And they won't need steam as we do, as *we* don't
need sails and shrouds,

And they'll climb the top of heaven with ten
cargoes to our one,
And their tracks will reach from sunrise to the
setting of the sun. . . .
And, sometime, I'll maybe sit here, full of age,
and sing the praise
In the ears of young air-sailors Of the Good Old
Steamboat Days!

THE OLD SAILOR'S REMEDY

WHEN love is driving hard ahead
  Through squall on gusty squall
There's nothing like a ship at sea
  With masts square-rigged and tall . . .
Jack swears that he will never,
  He will never love again:
(They've nosed the ship from harbour
  Through the grey, enormous rain);
Jim vows that he will never
  Look again in Mary's eyes:
(And both of them believe their oaths —
  Yet what they swear is — lies!)
Oh Billy and his girl were out
  For many a doleful day:
The only remedy for all
  Was for to sail away,
To sail away, to sail away
  Forgetting girls and love
Where, white as new-washed sheep, the waves
  Crowd onward, drove on drove. . . .

Oh, heave the rattling anchor up
  And walk the capstan round —
They've left the god of love behind,
  They're free, and outward bound. . . .

One day . . . and two . . . the ocean sweeps
  And curdles at the prow —
Then comes a pull to Billy's mouth
  A pucker to Jim's brow,
And Jack, he climbs, disconsolate,
  To reef the sails above —
They're thinking, Oh, they're thinking
  Of the little girls they love. . . .
It isn't very long before
  The ship's a secret flame
As every seaman, night and day,
  Repeats some woman's name,
And, as they holystone the deck,
  Or chip the rust, or paint,
The things they didn't like in them
  Seem virtues of a saint:
Oh, some say this, and some say that
  When sweethearts don't agree —
But I say KEEP THE GIRLS AT HOME
  AND SHIP THE LADS TO SEA.

THE SAILOR'S FAREWELL

A CHANTEY

OH, what will you do, my own love,
When you go down to sea?
— I'll pull upon the halyards
At portside and at lee.

And is there nothing else, love?
— I'll climb the whistling shrouds
And sing, and take in sky-sails
Away up in the clouds.

There's something you've forgotten! . . .
— I'll walk my watch by night
While all the stars of heaven
Lean over, height on height.

Is this the way you leave me?
O love, you break my heart!
— I've hugged you and I've kissed you,
How else may lovers part?

If you have nothing better! . . .
— I'll wear upon my breast
The picture that you gave me
And say your love is best.

At halyards and at sky-sails,
At watch, both night and day! . . .
AT LAST YOU'VE SAID THE RIGHT WORDS
I WANTED YOU TO SAY!

THE FOG

THE fog fell: lamps were filled and lit;
They glimmered in mid-day, —
And, step by step, men went abroad
Into a world all grey.

A SAILOR'S LIFE

OH, a sailor hasn't much to brag —
An oilskin suit and a dunnage bag.
But, howsoever humble he be,
By the Living God, he has the sea!

The long, white leagues and the foam of it,
And the heart to make a home of it,
On a ship that kicks up waves behind
Through the blazing days and tempests blind.

Oh, a sailor hasn't much to love —
But he has the huge, blue sky above,
The everlasting waves around,
That wash with an eternal sound.

So bury me, when I come to die,
Where the full-sailed, heeling clippers ply;
Give up the last cold body of me
To the only home that I have — the sea!

JIM

WE couldn't make him out: he seldom spoke;
We never caught him smiling at a joke —
And yet he was a decent lad for work:
On watch or off, he was the last to shirk —
So that, among ourselves, we came to say,
"Jim, he's alright, he's only got his way."
Yet, somehow, in each storm he didn't care.
His life or death seemed only God's affair —
So when the cry came, in a Nor'west Blow,
"Man overboard!" we each one seemed to *know;*
From the main topsail yardarm he had gone
Into the boiling seas . . . the ship held on;
There was no saving him in such a gale.
Then, when the dawn came, wide, and grey, and pale,
We brought his sea-chest aft with all it stored
(The custom when a man goes overboard).
It held the usual things that sailors own;
But, at the bottom, in a box, alone,
We found a woman's picture — and we knew,
Now, why he'd been so offish with the crew —
He'd written it as plain as plain could be —
"She went and married HIM instead of me!"

SHANGHAIED

SHANGHAIED! . . . I swore I'd stay ashore
And sail the wide, wide seas no more! . . .
  Shanghaied! shanghaied!
Shanghaied — with pals I've never known,
And my heart's as heavy as a stone. . . .
  Shanghaied! . . . shanghaied!

Yes, here's the wide, grey sea again
And the work that takes the souls from men,
  Shanghaied! . . . shanghaied!
Yes, yon's the mist they call the shore,
And here are the ropes I must haul once more —
  Shanghaied! . . . shanghaied!

Shanghaied — and on a ship I hate,
With a cur for a captain, a brute for a mate. . .
  Shanghaied! . . . shanghaied!
Oh, when I set my foot ashore
I'll drink no more . . . and I'll sail no more!
  Shanghaied! Shanghaied!

THE SAILOR'S RETURN

OH love of mine, what shall I do
When your ship comes sailing home
With its white sails in the sky
And its wake all white with foam.

— Meet me at the silent bend
Where the river runs to sea;
Have the cottage fire a-glow,
Kettle on the hob for me.

There's a kettle on the hob
And the fire is a-light.
— Set a lamp to guide me in,
I might come when it is night.

Nay, I have my bride-dress on,
Nothing can my vow undo, —
They've bound me to another man,
To another, not to you.

— Sweetheart, what is that to me!
I will neither bless nor ban . . .
My body's fifty fathom down;
I'm a ghost, and not a man!

THE ENDLESS LURE

WHEN I was a lad I went to sea
And they made a cabin boy of me.
(Yo ho, haul away, my bullies)
We'd hardly put out from the bay
When my knees sagged in and my face turned grey;

So I went to the captain and I implored
That he'd let the pilot take me aboard,
And fetch me back to the land again
Where the earth was sure for the feet of men. . . .

But the Captain, he laughed out strong, and said,
"You'll follow the sea, lad, till you're dead;
For it gets us all — the sky and the foam
And the waves and the wind, — till a ship seems home."

When I shipped as an A. B. before the mast
I swore each voyage would be my last. . . .
Was always vowing, and meant it, too,
That I'd *never sign* with another crew. . . .

You tell me "The Castle" is outward bound,
An old sky-sailor, for Puget Sound?

"Too old!" . . . but I know the sea like a book. . . .
Well, I've heard that your "Old Man" needs a cook! . . .
Yes, I could rustle for twenty men. . . .
So, God be praised, you can use me, then? . . .
Oh, there's only a few years left for me,
And I want to die, and be buried at — sea!

SAILORMEN

WHEN our ship gets home again, after cruising up and down,
Where the old, familiar hills crowd above the little town,
Oh, we'll reef the weary sails in the shelter of the bay,
And we'll find it just the same as the hour we went away
With the steeple of the church through the tree tops peering out,
With the same accustomed streets, and the friends we knew, about.

Oh, we'll sit before the hearth and we'll smoke a pipe or so,
And we'll have a pot of ale at the inn before we go,
And we'll kiss the prettiest girls, and we'll tell the children tales
Of the countries that we've seen, of the shipwrecks and the gales,
Till the cargo's battened down, and we're outward bound once more
While the sea goes rushing back to the far, receding shore.

THE WRECK

SEARED bone-white by the glare of summer
weather,
Cast side-long, on the barren beach she lies,
She who once brought the earth's far ends
together
And ransacked East and West for merchandise.

The sea-gulls cluster on her after-deck
Resting from the near seas that wash and
fall. . . .
But, I have heard, at night this side-cast wreck
(When all the belfry bells at midnight call)

Puts up sail and goes out past mortal seeing:
Once more the oceans break beneath her will
And she resumes the breath of her old being;
She lives the dreams that slumber in her still.

Thrilling as down the windy Dark she slopes,
Ecstatic, as her sails grow great with wind —
She feels the seamen walking with her ropes,
The harbour dropping like a star behind.

THE STORM

THE sea rose and the crests swept by
  Like clouds of white, close-flying birds
And the wind drove from sky to sky
  The waves' illimitable herds;

And, though a thousand miles from land,
  We heard innumerable feet,
A motion and commingled sound
  Like routed armies in retreat.

THE SHIPWRECKED SAILOR

THERE blossomed into golden day another
rosy morn:
The shipwrecked sailor woke, and watched
again, of hope forlorn,
From his high, purple-misted peak, a rag about
his hip:
His only dream, his native land — his only
prayer, a ship!
The fringe of surf laced in and out along the
shell-strewn shore;
Beside the reef strange creatures sailed plying
a sentient oar,
And, great and wide, the sea rolled far in azure
distance dim
And laved the edges of the sky with its blue-
washing rim.
The sailor thought of paven streets in a far,
smoky town
Where day and night the cable-cars went boom-
ing up and down:
Each little common thought of men smote
through him like a dart,
And memories of a woman winged like white
birds through his heart.

WIND-JAMMER'S SONG

1845. CLIPPER DAYS

ALL hands on deck, below there!
The storm is coming soon,
The clouds tramp on in panic
Across the swirling moon.

The wind pipes in the halyards,
We lean with scanted sail;
Now, with a leap, we're riding
The first rush of the gale;

The lubbers in their cabins
Crouch close and pray for life:
The young man free and single,
The old man, by his wife;

And one would give his fortune,
And one, his love so fair,
For solid earth to stand on
If but a furlong square.

It's up the shrouds, my hearties,
And reef the gansells tight, —
The blow that we are having
May blow the world from sight. . . .

Tomorrow, lads, the landsmen,
How they will strut and lie, —
And we — we'll squirt tobacco
And wink the other eye,

Saying, as we plunge onward
With tier on tier of sail —
"I've seen worse in my time, sir, —
Yet — 'twas a proper gale!"

THE CHANT OF THE DERELICT

DRIFTING, drifting here with the tide
While the seams that the sea-weeds caulk gape wide
Like a star with eternity for its bride
I accept the measureless sea —
While trampling oceans break in foam
Comb over phosphorescent comb
Over and over me.

Driven, driven at the wind's will
Through dawns and midnights far and still
While the sun, as huge as the top of a hill,
Heaves from, sinks in, the Main, —
To the north, to the south, to the east, to the west
I plunge and plunge my blackened breast
And turn and turn again.

And ever I dream of the shifting feet
Of seamen above, and the whistle sweet —
Though the driving rain and the wind and the sleet —
Of the bo'sun that calls in storm. . . .
And the ships that I have known in the Past
Grow, full-sailed, on the ghostly blast,
Form over swelling form. . . .

Thank God that I, though black-decayed,
Through the broken path of the moon still wade
Or where dawns like shimmering silks invade
  The drab of the eastern skies, —
That still I wallow through trembling stars
And shatter them into silver bars
  Where a Way of Wonder lies, —

I, a Derelict, broken and vast,
By every wave that lips me cast
Till I think each lift will be my last
  Ere I sink to the depths below,
Where a thousand comrades, strewn along,
Made brave by legend and tale and song
  Wait, coral-grown, in a row. . . .

'Tis said that they've charted me, marked me
    down
As a drifting thing of ill-renown
By the varying tides and breezes sown
  In the paths of orderly ships, —
I, who have carried their India wares,
And, running about the world's affairs,
  Have met all seas at grips!

Alas, for the thankless heart of Man,
That, full of service, the Survey's ban
Should fall on me who, full-rigged, ran
  From edge to edge of the sky. . . .

But, ah, I shall speak once more with a ship
A great, wide-sailed, down-bearing ship
  Ere I take my doom and die, —

And I shall know one large embrace
As I meet a comrade face to face
While she comes at a stately, star-lit pace
  Over the moon-calm sea, —
Surprising her with the sudden drift
And the ancient, loving, weed-grown lift
  Of this poor old body of me. . . .

Oh, ever I dream of the tread of feet
And the sound of the bo'sun's whistle sweet
And so I am glad, I am glad to greet
  The unwary ships that pass, —
Though they come on me like the hiss of hail
That rides the top of a grey-maimed gale
  And tinkle like breaking glass;

For to me they are love, to me they are life
And a long-sought woman taken to wife
After courtship's dallying strife, —
  Alas, that they sink in the sea!
But 'tis the fault of the ghosts that steer,
Not mine, that they are cloven sheer,
  By the high, gaunt sides of me!

Drifting, drifting here with the tide
While the seams that the sea-weeds caulk gape
wide
I wait, I wait for the full broadside
Of the wave that will bring my doom
When I'll sink at last, to lurch endlong,
Myself a memory and a song, —
Asleep in the great, green gloom!

SEASIDE TALKERS

PROVINCETOWN, SUMMER OF 1917

THEY drank the bitter, salt wine of the sea,
They breathed up drowning bubbles from below
While we sat in the storm's red after-glow
Discussing Art and Love — and sipping tea.
I was a poet, he, an artist; she,
A famous actress . . . lightly to and fro
We shuttled epigrams as salesmen show
Rich silks that change in colors momently.

And while the fishers clung to planks and spars
And rode the huge backs of the waves, we sat
Beneath a young night full of summer stars:
And we discussed of life this way and that
Until we felt, when we arose for bed,
That there was nothing left had not been said.

SAID THE CAPTAIN TO ME

NOTHING but damn fools sail the sea,"
Said the Captain to me.
"I have a young son," says the Captain to me,
"I'm damned if he ever shall sail the sea!"

THEN

WHEN all the sea's high ships
Have dropped beyond my sky
And life's trumpet leaves my lips
And women pass me by —
Dear God, let me die!

THE BEACH COMBER

I'D like to return to the world again,
To the dutiful, work-a-day world of men, —
For I'm sick of the beach-comber's lazy lot,
Of the one volcano flaming hot,
With the snow round its edge and the fire in its throat,
And this tropical island that seems a-float
Like a world set in space all alone in the sea. . . .
How I wish that a ship, it would stop for me.
I'm sick of the brown girl that loves me, I'm sick
Of the cocoanut groves, — you can't take me too quick
From this place, though it's rich in all nature can give. . . .
For I want to return where it's harder to live,
Where men struggle for life, where they work and find sweet
Their rest after toil, and the food that they eat. . . .
What? A ship's in the offing? . . . dear God, let me hide, —
They're in need of a sailor, are waiting the tide
To put off? . . . I will hide where the great cliff hangs sheer —
Give 'em mangoes and goats, *and don't tell 'em I'm here!*

THE BALLAD OF ENGLISH JOHN, THE BUCCANEER

I DIDN'T think that I'd be caught,
But, midway in the fight,
A score of Spaniards bore me down
And covered me from sight, —
Then, on my feet, I found my arms
Drawn backward, bound and tight.

They dragged me down below in chains,
They feared to set me free;
I lay there in the drip and slime
And listened to the sea;
They gave me bread I couldn't eat,
And rats ran over me.

I dreamed, to wake — and dream again
Of wild, free ocean ways, —
My life grew big before me like
A spark that makes a blaze. . . .
We seemed to sail for endless nights
And weary, endless days.

At last, "get up, you Englishman,"
I heard . . . a torch flared red. . . .
One booted at my rattling ribs,
One bashed me in the head. . . .
"My friends, I hope we meet in hell,"
Were all the words I said.

They rode me inland to Madrid
  A-rolling in a cart;
They threw me out and broke my arm
  That couldn't break my heart, —
And I sat up and cursed all Spain
  In bower and hall and mart.

They dragged me to a scaffold, next;
  Though ended now my play,
Yet, in my final scene of life,
  I stood up in the day:
I kicked the hangman, laughed at death, —
  Which made the ladies gay:

The ladies whispered, "it's a shame,"
  (Each fluttering her fan)
"Aye, it's a shame his life must fall
  Beneath the hangman's ban!"
And each one thought within her heart
  I was a proper man.

A CARIBBEAN FANTASY

SAILING the Caribbean Main
In the latter days of Spain
Through amber deeps I could behold
Great galleons bright with sunken gold.
My boat, of quaintest mother-of-pearl,
Was steered by my brown Indian girl.
We saw ships with their rigging down
Go limping to Havanna Town,
Beaten and faint from English stour
In the red wane of Spain's last power, —
Ships under blue and purple sails
And weighted down with spicy bales.
I looked on them and "Love," quoth I,
"What profits it to do and die? —
Better to dream with an Indian Girl
In a ship of pearl, on a sea of pearl."

BUCCANEER DAYS

THERE were a host of galleons in the wild
sea days of yore
Whose spacious holds were heavy-wombed with
tons of sunny ore.
Their ammirals, primal-hearted men, who cut
men's throats with tears,
Wore rainbow sashes round their loins and gold
rings in their ears,
And for the English buccaneers they kept a
weather eye
As the gaunt and savage wolf holds watch for
the eagle from the sky.

Oh brave Sir Walter Raleigh, he who crushed
the Spanish power,
The Great Queen kissed him at the Court and
killed him in the Tower,
The captains and the ammirals, some strangled
'neath the foam,
And some were buried with acclaim and elegy at
home.
Above their final dwelling place a visored figure
lies
With pious Latin epitaph and hands crossed
Christianwise.
The fleet ships, having known their times,
rotted in bight and bay,

Or at the bottom of the sea — and naught
remains today
Of the first great youth of England and the
haughty prime of Spain
But a broken bolt, a blunderbuss, and a grin-
ning skull or twain.

GHOST-SONG OF THE SPANISH BUCCANEERS

WE are the Spanish Buccaneers, none braver ever died, —
We waded through five hells of sand with nothing but our pride,
Our Spanish pride and our lust for gold and nothing else beside.

Oh, ever our fevered nights were hung with strange new stars a-swim
As we mixed barbaric litanies with credo and with hymn,
While every morn an alien dawn flared up the desert's rim. . . .

One noon we glimpsed a shining lake that silver-lit the plain;
But trees grew nigh it upside-down, then right-side-up again, —
And we knew it was the Devil's lie, and prayed to God for rain;

And once we saw a fleet of ships that sailed along the sand
Where a sea that never was, broke white on a dim, dissolving strand, —
And we prayed to Christ, as children do, and trudged on hand in hand. . . .

Oh, ever the Cities of Cibola, we saw them in
our sleep:
Their climbing tops sat in the sky like clouds
piled heap on heap,
And we laughed apart like madmen, each with
his own dream to keep. . . .
And, though we never got to them, but, one by
one, sank down,
The Seven Cities of Cibola belie not their
renown,
But, somewhere, yet, they wait our quest, each
star-encircled town!

WHEN THRAN WAS KING

VIKING SONG

In memory of Theodore Roosevelt

THERE was never rust on the oarlocks
When Thran was king;
Our ships were as swift as swallows
On dipping wing;
There was never rust on the spearhead
Nor on the sword
When Thran, that mighty viking,
Was over-lord.
How we shouted at the oar-sweeps
As down the day
Our beaked prows clove asunder
Their foamy way. . . .

Multitudinous as armies
That bivouac wide
The stars they camped about us,
And the great tide
Was powdered golden with them
Till we beheld
That naught was true but Magic
And, wonder-spelled,
We knew Romance was greater
Than Fact can say
As the dawn set us, golden,
In golden day. . . .

Oh, there were lands to greet us
  Fringed round with foam
That almost slew forever
  All thoughts of home;
Oh, there were copper women
  In isles sun-trod
Who bent down low before us,
  Each man, a god;
And there were ancient cities
  That loomed alone
Each shining tower a ruby,
  A gem, each stone. . . .

Yea, we've come back to Norland,
  Now Thran has died,
To men who love their bellies
  And naught beside,
Who think that we are children
  And smile askance,
Daring not drink the vintage
  Of High Romance. . . .
Aye, fat smoke wreathes the cottage;
  There's much to eat:
You've full grain from the harvest,
  You've good red meat —
But, though you call us madmen,
  We'll ever sing
Of the great years of wonder
  When Thran was king!

THERE WAS A LITTLE QUEEN IN EGYPT

GALLEY-SLAVE CHANTEY

Sung at the Oars

THERE was a little Queen in Egypt,
(Long, a very long time ago)
— Fell in love with a Roman Captain;
(It's chill and bleak, but the wind must blow).

She had a thousand girls to serve her;
(We've left the jettied port behind)
The weight of all her rubies tired her,
(But when were chains of iron kind?)

They cooked ten wild boars for her dinner,
(Bring on, bring on your mouldy bread)
And brought them in on golden platters,
(Yo ho! the open sea's ahead!)

Her slaves played all night long on zithers,
(And we must row and row till dawn)
And She and her Captain loafed in purple,
(And we've but tattered loin-clothes on).

Wine red and white it flowed like rivers. . . .
(And it's brackish water we get to drink)
The world was a tossed-up ball between 'em,
(These long nights make a fellow think).

They say they tossed the ball and they lost it,
(The stars will be coming pretty soon)
That now they lie on a windy headland,
(— Wish that was the sun instead of the moon).

They say that they sleep and sleep forever,
(While we pull hard in the wind and Wet),
Laid forever away in the darkness,
(And it's precious little sleep we get) —

Side by side in the empty silence —
O Queen of Egypt, O Captain-King,
We, slaves, and chained to our oars, salute you!
God was good and you had your fling!

THE CHANTEY OF NOAH AND HIS ARK

Old Father Noah, he built him an ark. . . .
Roofed it over with hickory bark

OLD SCHOOL SONG

OH, Noah went up to the hills, a just man and a good,
(Yo ho, lads, the rain must fall),
He built an Ark, the Good Book says, of pitch and gopher wood;
(And the water, it tumbles over all).
The children danced before him, and the Grown-ups laughed, behind;
They thought that there was something wrong with Goodman's Noah's mind. . . .
And when they met him coming back for needments and supplies,
The dancing girls and dancing men leered, mocking, in his eyes, —
And as he left the town once more and sought the hillward track,
The boys sent shouts and whistles shrill behind the old man's back.
Oh, Noah took the animals and saved them, two by two;
The elephant, the leopard, and the zebra, and the gnu,

The goose, the ox, the lion, and the stately unicorn
That breasted up the gangway with his single, jaunty horn,
The hipporgriff, the oryx,—all created things, in fine,
Till the dim procession straggled from the far horizon line.
There was neighing, squealing, barking, there was many a snort and squeak,
Every sound that God gives animals because they cannot speak;
And they waddled and they straddled, and they ambled, and they ran,
And they crawled and traipsed and sidled, each one after nature's plan.
There was pattering of hooves and toes and lift of hairy knees —
Oh, it was the greatest cattleboat that ever sailed the seas. . . .
There was never any showman ever gave such a parade
As those beasts, that wended arkward, for the gaping people made;
And Noah's townsmen wished him well who once had wished him ill —
For they hoped he planned a circus on his solitary hill
Where he'd charge so much admission at the ark's red-postered door —
Offering such a show as mankind never set eyes on before. . . .

But the sky grew dark with thunder throbbing
like an angry drum
And the gazers saw with terror that the thing
they'd mocked had come,
And that what had seemed a circus marching
slowly in parade
Was the end of all creation and the world's
last cavalcade.
Oh, the lightning dangled nearer like a madman's
rattling chain. . . .
As an army moves to battle came the growing
sound of rain:
And it rained . . . and rained . . . and rained
. . . and rained . . . as we do understand,
Till the earth was filled with water and there
wasn't any land!

OH, NOAH WAS A JUST MAN, A JUST MAN AND A
GOOD. . . .
(YO HO, LADS, THE RAIN MUST FALL)
HE BUILT THE ARK, THE GOOD BOOK SAYS, OF
PITCH AND GOPHER WOOD,
(AND THE WATER, IT TUMBLED OVER ALL).

WHEN HAM AND SHEM AND JAPHET —

A SAILOR'S SONG

WHEN Ham and Shem and Japhet
They walked the capstan round
Upon the strangest vessel
Was ever outward bound,
The music of their voices
From wave to welkin rang:
They sang the first sea-chantey
That seamen ever sang:
They sang of towns they'd been to,
Of girls that they had known,
Of what they'd done as children,
Of how the years had flown,
Of fights they'd had, and friendships,
Of many a hearty spree —
The same as every sailor
That sails upon the sea. . . .

Now Noah, he was sitting
Alone and glum, below,
A-puzzling just a little
Why things were ordered so,
(For, though his soul accepted
What God commanded, still,
At times he knew misgivings
As every good man will) —

When up above he heard them
A-singing, outward bound,
And walking, walking, walking,
Walking the capstan round, —
Then, just as quick, his worry,
Passed, like a gust of wind,
And he shinned up the ladder
And left his doubts behind,
And, with his great beard flowing,
His grey robe pulled a-skew,
He walked the capstan with them:
He started singing, too!

THE CHANTEY OF JONAH

THEY'D amulets and written charms, they'd
little gods of stone,
And teraphim of ivory and wood and polished
bone;
They'd images of ebony and images of jade
That swarthy seamen worshipped, following the
Tarshish trade;
The Captain's god was Merodach, all wrought
of beaten gold,
And richer than the merchandise they treasured
in the hold
The First Mate held his silver Baal . . . a
polished stick of wood
The ring-eared Ethiopian owned, and swore it
did him good, —
And twice a day they knelt to pray and knock
their heads and groan
Before their gold and ivory, their silver, wood,
and stone.
The sea was like a shield of blue to the horizon's
rim
As forth they put from Joppa with their gods
and teraphim, —
With that one bearded man aboard who down
the gangway trod
So swift in haste for Tarshish he forgot to bring
his god. . . .

"By Merodach," the Captain swore, who walked the deck alone,
"He hasn't even got a god of common wood or stone!"
"Now by my silver Baal," swore the Mate, "he's bold, to go
Without a god to kneel before when storms begin to blow!" . . .
The savage black man pitied him in case a wind should rise
And wash the hissing waters up against beleaguered skies;
But Jonah laughed and went below, when he was snug aboard,
Assured that he'd out-sped, at last, the Presence of The Lord:
What though the doom of Nineveh hung dark upon the air,
He cast the prophet's robe aside, and slept, and did not care.
Then God sent forth a wind to sea to search His Prophet out:
The tackles creaked, the oars were shipped, the seamen clumped about;
The waves, that flashed like fire abaft and tumbled with a roar,
Were crowding on the deck in heaps and coming more and more;

Their curling tops were lifted sheer and pelted
through the air. . . .
And then the Wind sped back to God, and said,
"Thy Man is there!"
And God sent forth another wind, a greater
Wind by far,
That twisted like a twig of tree both sturdy
mast and spar, —
And THAT wind came, and said to Him, "Thy
Man indeed is blind
That thinks, by going down to sea, he's left
Thee, Lord, behind!"
"Oh, yet a little while," quoth God, "and he
shall ponder well
The Shadow of my Hand spreads black above
the Red of Hell,
The Shadow of my Hand is cast on utmost
wastes of sea,
And even huge Leviathan before my wrath must
flee, —
And there is nothing lives at all without the
aid of Me!"
The Negro knelt before his Stick and prayed
with clicking tongue.
Each man unwrapped his little god and to its
succour clung —
(Each little god of ebony, and jade, and wood,
and stone,

Each image made of ivory, and shaped of polished bone)
In vain the Mate made oaths to Baal, in vain the Captain told
Of what an altar he would build to please his god of gold;
The water flew up in his face as sharp as winter sleet;
It made a noise of trampling like a hundred thousand feet. . . .
"Has every shipman bowed his head? Is every god implored?"
"Nay, yet there bides that bearded man that came in haste aboard."
"Oh, stranger, rise and lift your eyes, and if you have a god,
Cry out to him to smite the waves down level with his rod;
We've even had the Nigger's Stick to listen to our prayer!" . . .
Then Jonah lifted up his eyes and saw that God was there —
Then Jonah rose and answered back, "I brought no god with me,
For who can wrap in cloth the One who made the sky and sea:
I could not tuck Him in my sleeve whose mighty Hand has made
The sun that is a shining thing and gives each tree its shade, —

Whose thumb and finger, reaching out, hide all
the stars in day. . . .
And yet, when He commanded me, I thought
to run away."
Then, in the darkness of the storm that made
the mid-day dim,
The men cast lots, one after one, until it fell
on him:
And Jonah rose and spoke to them to cast him
overboard
Unto the easing of the storm, the proving of
the Lord —
And when they'd cast him overboard a great
voice whispered "Cease!"
And, league on league, the mighty waves fell
flat in shining peace. . . .
The negro, he was first to rise and take his
polished wood
And send it flying overboard to float along the flood,
A sea-gull perching on it . . . then the men of
Tarshish Trade
Took all their little images of ivory and jade,
Took all their helpless little gods of jacinth,
bronze, and bone, —
Took quaint-legged, ugly, squatting things of
wood and polished stone,
And flung them, scorning, in the sea, — and,
as they bubbled down,
One cried, "come back, if ye be gods, — and, if
ye be not, drown!" . . .

The Mate flung forth his silver god his fathers
loved of old,
And from their Captain's fist there sped a flying
thing of gold, —
And, men from all the coigns of earth, they bent
the knee aboard
To the Mercy and the Majesty, the Glory of the
Lord!

HESPERIDES

BEYOND the blue rim of the world,
Washed round with languid-lapsing seas,
Where the Wind's wings were ever furled
The Ancients dreamed Hesperides.

Ship after ship each age sent forth
To find the Islands Of the Blest;
The loosed winds drove them south and north,
But west they weathered, ever west.

Sky after sky they dropped behind,
Those mighty-handed, bearded men,
Till, seeking what they could not find,
They rounded upward, home again.

A desultory waif of time
Flying adventure from my mast,
'Twas thus I voyaged every clime
To come back to myself at last!

RECOLLECTION

A BALLADE OF FORMER TRAMP-DAYS

THE cars lay on a siding through the night;
The scattered yard lamps winked in green and red;
I slept upon bare boards with small delight, —
My pillow, my two shoes beneath my head;
As hard as my own conscience was my bed;
I lay and listened to my own blood flow;
Outside, I heard the thunder come and go
And glimpsed the golden squares of passing trains,
Or felt the cumbrous freight train rumbling slow;
And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.

Against the tramp the laws are always right,
So often in a cell I broke my bread
Where bar on bar went black across my sight;
On county road or rockpile ill I sped
Leg chained to leg like man to woman wed,
My wage for daily toil an oath, a blow;
I cursed my days that they were ordered so;
I damned my vagrant heart and dreaming brains
That thrust me down among the Mean and Low —
And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.

I crept with lice that stayed and stayed for
spite;
I froze in "jungles" more than can be said;
Dogs tore my clothes, and in a woeful plight
At many a back door for my food I pled
Until I wished to God that I was dead. . . .
My shoes broke through and showed an out-
burst toe;
On every side the world was all my foe,
Threatening me with jibe and jeer and chains,
Hard benches, cells, and woe on endless woe —
And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.

Brighter, in fine, than anything I know
Like sunset on a distant sea a-glow
My curious memory alone maintains
The richer worth beneath the wretched show
Of vagrant life still sweet for all its pains.

I'VE DECKED THE TOPS

I'VE decked the tops of flying cars
That leaped across the night;
The long and level coaches skimmed
Low, like a swallow's flight.

Close to the sleet-bit blinds I've clung
Rocking on and on;
All night I've crouched in empty cars
That rode into the dawn,

Seeing the ravelled edge of life
In jails, on rolling freights
And learning rough and ready ways
From rough and ready mates.

JAIL, A TRAMP RHYTHM

IN the chill, grey drip of a winter morn
They dragged us off to jail.
The young moon tipped her ghostly horn
Where a patch of mist grew pale. . . .

Closer our ragged coats we drew,
Though it was in the South. . . .
The Sheriff had one eye 'stead of two
And a cruel twist to his mouth. . . .

The Yard was full of shadowy cars. . . .
A distant whistle screamed. . . .
Switch-lights glimmered like scattered stars. . . .
An engine clanked and steamed. . . .

Dusk cars, dim-bodied, looming shapes,
Stood ranged in a huddled line. . . .
In soft release the air escapes;
A lantern lifts, a-shine. . . .

It lifts and falls . . . the cinders crunch. . . .
A brakeman passes near . . .
Then the cars jerk and roar and plunge
Like herds that move with fear. . . .

And so they led us off to jail
Upon that winter morn
When the young moon made the dusk grow pale
With the fire of its fading horn.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

MY father was a dark-complected man
Who in a moment's joy my life began:
Before him my old and erect grandsire
Burned through, like him, with madness and a fire,
And I am surely kinsman to their clan.

I always loathed the four walls of a room,
And the glad summer varying sun and gloom
I revelled in, — I loved to sprawl in grass
And watch the footless wind-gusts dip and pass
In fields of wheat, on uplands bright with bloom;

And where the twinkling waters of the sea
Washed outward into blue immensity
And then came thundering shoreward sky-outpoured
As if they fled in terror from the Lord,
I raced the sands in naked ecstasy.

BALLADE OF COMPLAINT AGAINST THE VAGRANT LIFE

I SICKEN of the campfire's glow
Which turns a ghost before the day;
The leaf that dawdles to and fro
Soon changes green for graveyard grey
Though for a while it lift and play
Clothed like a king in gold and red. . . .
Cast into jails, unhoused, half-fed,
How can I climb (though I be fain
Of stars that beckon overhead),
To heights the master minds attain?

The moving seas where great winds blow
I love indeed — yet I gainsay
Those slant-stacked ships that smoking go
And leave behind a foamy way·
A bull-necked captain to obey
Or mate who leaves no curse unsaid —
Such is the life by seamen led
Despite the dreams romancers feign;
And who can climb, with heart of dread,
To heights the master minds attain?

The burnt-out lamp that gutters low
Casts on a songless page its ray,
Nor can the poet, drawn with woe,
To penury and want a prey,
In his cold attic build that lay

That lives when he who sang is dead;
A thousand worries throng, instead,
The gloomy twilight of his brain. . . .
How can one rise, sore-pinched for bread,
To heights the master minds attain?

Thus I, to mighty visions wed,
Drop twenty shafts before they're sped,
Shoot twenty more that fly in vain. . . .
Nor may I climb, though greatly led,
To heights the master minds attain.

THE SCARECROW WOMAN

SOUTHAMPTON JAIL, ENGLAND

POOR Scarecrow Woman, worn and marred,
Unhymned as yet by any bard —
No limb but what is hung askew,
No joint but what the bone shines through;

Broken by need and greed and lust;
With shambling foot and flattened bust,
Removed from beauty or the saints, —
You are the thing no artist paints!

What brought you down so low as this
From all that men feign woman is,
What hidden shame or dreadful chance
From all that poets deem romance?

Yet, whether born, or brought to be
This crawling thing of misery,
You shall not go unsung to death
With rheumy eyes and wheezy breath –
I'll force my loathing Muse to sing
Your fame, at last, poor scarecrow thing!

THE CALL

OH, Duty is bare and the sark of Care is
ragged and thin and old;
I will cast her aside and take for my bride a
Muse in a cloth of gold.
I have heard the call of the wind-swept pine and
there bides no rest for me;
My soul is drenched with clear starshine and
drunk with the wine of the sea.

What care I now for the broken vow and the
word by the deed gainsaid?
Ere the night was torn with the sun, new-born,
my life to my fate was wed.
I am going South to a bayou-mouth where
quiet forever reigns,
Where the migrant flight of the geese by night
and the sober-stalking cranes

And the stars that creep o'er the Crystal Deep
in the course of the Southern night
Not yet complain of the lesser Cain who comes
with his gun to smite.
There the long low moan of the ocean's tone as
it rides on the wind from far
Doth make one think that he stands on the
brink of a sea on another star,

Not here where men, again and again, in a
treadmill, day by day,
Go 'round and 'round in a narrow bound and
labour their joy away.
Ere my heart grow sad and the joy I've had
fade out and die like a dream,
And my soul peak thin mid the hurry and din
and the noise of hammers and steam,

(For the Bought and the Sold be the getting
of gold), I will leave the City behind,
And my soul shall be as wide and free as a
heaven-searching wind.
Persuade me not for a passion hot and a wild,
wind-drifted cry
Sweeps over me like the tides of the sea — I
must go or my soul will die.

I have heard the call of the wind-swept pine
and there bides no rest for me.
My soul is drunk with clear starshine and
drenched with the wine of the sea,
And Duty is bare and the sark of Care is ragged
and thin and old —
I will cast her aside and take for a bride a Muse
in a cloth of gold.

RIDING BY NIGHT

THE great-wheeled, twi-domed engine waits
  Expectant, for the signal to depart;
The fireman opens wide the furnace door
  And bares the fire's red heart;

Then the conductor's lantern lifts and falls,
  And, down the car-thronged yards the coaches glide,
And, leaping like a runner to the race,
  We gain the countryside.

Out at the window into night I peer
  While the bright coaches hurtle through the gloom
Like some swift meteor with a shining tail
  Which rushes to its doom.

A thousand darkling fields and woods sweep past;
  Infrequent blurs of light go trailing by,
And here and there a single farmhouse shows
  A pale and single eye.

THE RETURN

I HID behind a side-tracked car until there
echoed clear
As a signal of the starting, two sharp whistles
on my ear,
Then, with a long, laborious groan the freight
got under way
And ponderous cars went hulking by like ele-
phants at play.
I gripped an iron rung and swung aboard with
flapping coat.
The engine sent a wailing dirge from its deep
iron throat
And vanished in a Cut which gaped, a brown
gash, new and raw;
One either side the jagged rocks, like the broken
teeth of a saw
Leaped up and down with naked poles and
racing strands of wire. . . .
Then, flash! the engine reached the plain as a
cannon belches fire,
Wrapped in a cloud of rolling smoke. As on and
on we flew
The panorama of the fields went shifting out of view.
A scared thrush shot up from a bush and sought
the open sky;
A herd of cattle raised their heads and stared
rebukingly;

Above a marching clump of trees a wind-mill
spun its wheel,
And from a bank of toppling cloud there crashed
a thunder-peal.

The sun went down, the stars came out, I
crouched upon the coal
Feeling as if I had been made a lone, unbodied
soul:
Chance with great hands might crumple me like
any gossamer thing,
Might o'er the ramparts of the Flesh my startled
spirit fling
Where a scattered silver dust of worlds stream
down through endless night
As sun-motes in a darkened room dance down
a shaft of light. . . .

Now, like gigantic fireflies clustered on a Malay
tree,
The lamps of the division-end across the dark
I see. . . .
Dim boxcars huddle everywhere . . . I laugh as
I alight,
For, safe and sound in life and limb, I'm home
again tonight!

EXPERIENCE

IN the north where leagues of forest sag beneath the plumey snow,
I've worked with lurching-shouldered lumbermen;
I've seen the small, grey fishing fleets beat out with lifting bow
Toward the stormy coasts of Labrador again;
I've plucked the purple-swollen grape beside the Great Blue Lake,
And gathered pungent hops from off the vine;
I have watched the water swirling in the clumsy ore-boat's wake,
Laden down with dusty riches from the mine;
I've seen the mad steer plunge and fall beneath the sledge's stroke
In packing houses by the turbid Kaw;
I have rotted three long months in a steel-barred southern jail
And known the bitter irony of Law;
I have fed the myriad-headed grain into the toothed machine
Which tramples loud with wild, interior feet;
I have seen the Kansas plains carpeted with soft young corn
And garmented with glory of the wheat;

I have camped in California by the shoreward-heaving sea,
And I've walked Manhattan's pavements all night long —
But the lives I've lived and suffered paid me more than poverty:
They paid me in the golden coin of song;
They paid me in Song's golden coin . . . those days were never lost.
If I had died a hundred deaths it well were worth the cost;
For I beheld America — Her sunrise kissed my brow, —
I learned to sing the miracle of living here and now!

A TRAMP'S PRAYER

GREAT Spirit, when I soar away
Beyond the confines of this Day,
And sing because my earth-life's done,
And gaze back at the lessening sun;
I pray that thou wilt make me free
To roam through all infinity
Where comets roar with maddened hair
While the stars turn pale and stare
Like huddled herds of frightened sheep —
Else, give me, Lord, eternal sleep:
I do not care in heaven to bide
Forever by The Bridegroom's side.

THE WILD BIRD

IT'S good to be the wild bird
To pierce horizons a-far,
To hurl through night and sunlight
As sure as the flight of a star,
To pour down out of heaven
As sheep pour out of a fold
Where lone lakes lie in the sunset
A-ripple with fluctuant gold, —
To dive and cry and scurry
And shift in a joyous fleet
Where the sudden-pattering rainstorm
Roars by on a million feet!

MARCH NIGHT

THE vistaed concaves of infinity
Star-vast, and archipelagoed with suns,
And gulfed with stellar space — the luminous
banks
Of the gigantic, straggling Milky Way,
The moon that takes the huge world at one
glance,
Give me a winging sense of stars and space, —
Dim-bodied shapes of unimagined Dream
Beat round me with a multitude of wings;
Eternity's presence overshadows me,
And I reach out toward everlastingness. . . .

But now the moon's a ghost in silver mail,
As, blowing through a storm of stars, the earth
Dips downward into dawn, deluged with light —
Sunlight which is the golden laugh of God!

The naked trees, — gaunt, sullen limbs a-creak —
That shivered half alive in the rushing air
Of Winter, dream of greenness and are glad;
The marching armies of the snow have gone;
White blossoms soon will rain from windy boughs;
All Nature's little gentle things will wake,
And earth will grow a Wonder to the sky!

LET ME BE STILL LIFE'S FOOL

I HATE the wisdom of the Wise
  That think first of the rule
Before they plunge into the deed —
  Let me be still life's fool. . . .

For every glow the soul attains
  Is worth the exacted price,
And from the buds of impulse spring
  The fruits of paradise!

GO TELL THE LYING WORLD

GO tell the lying world that Indolence
Is not a siren sitting on white bones,
But the sweet nurse of fancy and romance,
Mother of song and every starry art, —
Go tell the world that we have found her so —
We, who weave wonder for the ears of men,
And, through all ages, beauty for men's eyes.

GOD'S BACCHANTE

THE rain rushed, grey and solid,
At window, wall, and door, —
It crashed across the housetops
Like waves that lift and roar.

It danced to drums of thunder,
It leaped along the plain,
It raced upon the hilltops —
God's Great Bacchante, Rain!

STAR-FACTS

TO think that we dwell on a star
And poise in the infinite sky
While all about us, a-far,
Systems and sun-drifts ply!

To think that we balance in space
Like an irised bubble in air
Where comets flash and race
With thunder in their hair!

MIDNIGHT

GREAT and vast as is the sea,
Its bounds are pettiness to me
Compared with this infinity
Which fetches compasses unknown
Where unnumbered worlds are strown
Through awful vastitudes star-sown.
Hence gain I that which makes me strong,
Hence draw my starry urns of song,
Hence get, half-felt, half-seen, half-heard,
The spirit that exalts the word.

TRANSMUTATION

SINCE bit by bit I've died so long,
I think I shall not mind
When picks and spades have delved for me
A hole that's close and blind.

I died a little when a friend
Unheeding, passed me by,
And when a woman that I loved
Revealed her love a lie;

I died a little when I stooped
To a revengeful score —
Yet, as I've died, so I've been born
Each day a little more. . . .

With every glimpse of loveliness
I am the more re-born,
With every laugh, with every kiss,
With every shining morn! . . .

So, one day, when they think me dead,
The truth of truths will be
That I've just walked out through a door
To immortality!

RAIN-SADNESS

THE fowls seek shelter, and the eaves
Drip-drip with melancholy rain —
I wonder why it makes me think
Of times which will not come again
And of great men who lived in vain?

MOON-DAWN

TO R. W.

THERE are more dawns than the one
Uprising of the sun.
There is a moon-dawn whose soft-flooding light
Makes a nocturnal day of night.
The whippoorwill's the moon-dawn's lark, he sings,
The immitigable passion of dumb things:
In shadowy woods a thousand night-things cry,
Unnumbered meadows lute in large reply.

THE CRY OF MAN

THERE is a crying in my heart
That never will be still,
Like the voice of a lonely bird
Behind a starry hill;

There is a crying in my heart
For what I may not know —
An infinite crying of desire
Because my feet are slow. . . .

My feet are slow, my eyes are blind,
My hands are weak to hold:
It is the universe I seek,
All life I would enfold!

TOWARDS DAWN

THE night verged slowly into dawn:
I waked while others slept,
Till through the shutters closely drawn
The infinite daylight crept;
I could not keep the morning out, —
Through every chink it came;
It poured its growing beams about
My lamp's decaying flame;
And when I left my written words
The sun was at my door:
I never knew so many birds
Lived in the trees before.

WHY?

WHY, when I pass through moving faces
Comes to me
Visions of beauty no man knows of,
None can see?

And, in the midst of the long day's traffic,
O'er and o'er
Why must I dream of a surf a-thunder
On an alien shore?

BLIND

CUMBERLAND MARKET, LONDON

THE Spring blew trumpets of color;
Her green sang in my brain. . . .
I heard a blind man groping
"Tap-tap" with his cane;

I pitied him his blindness;
But can I boast, "I see?"
Perhaps there walks a spirit
Close by, who pities me, —

A spirit who hears me tapping
The five-sensed cane of mind
Amid such unguessed glories
That I am worse than blind!

AUTUMN TWILIGHT

TO C. B.

Cornwall Bridge, Connecticut

RICH afterglows of Autumn
Fill all the world with light
And elm and oak and maple
Loom up like fire in flight,

And golden is the valley,
And golden is the hill,
And golden is the first star
At twilight's window-sill.

THE WIND'S LIFE

I LOVE the silver-shaken,
The windy tops of trees
That heave and lift in sequence,
Like running surf of seas,

With swathes of changing purples
And vistas golden-deep
Where, for an unstirred moment,
The sunlight lies asleep.

WONDER

A SEA that foams against untrodden sands;
A voyaged ship with high, sky-moving spars;
A casement opened by pale hidden hands;
A hill lost in a multitude of stars.

TRANSIT GLORIA

TOWARD yon star-cluster in vast Hercules
Our sun with all its worlds drops down the sky,
For, banked in shining heaps, the great suns fly
Onward in fiery swarms like golden bees,
While from all sides the everlasting seas
Of night break on them as they thunder by. . . .

And ignorant generations live and die
Amid this storm of stars, and feel at ease.

TO ONE WHO SAID HE WAS BORED WITH LIFE

IT bores you, then, to live and die
  Upon this cloud-scarfed ball
That drops from space to space of sky
  In one eternal fall?

With the great heavens drawn above,
  Beneath, the wondrous earth,
How strange is life, how strange is love,
  And death, that walks with birth. . . .

O, when I die, say I lived ill,
  Say that my days were poured
Like wasted wine, say all you will,
  But never, "Kemp was bored."

EXUBERANCE

GIVE me those people who will shout,
Sometimes, and wave their arms about;
Folk who will swear, and laugh, and cry,
Nor shape their conduct to another's eye:
How I've grown sick of the Polite
Whose only care is how to do things right!

THE HUMMING BIRD

THE sunlight speaks and its voice is a bird:
It glimmers half-guessed, half-seen, half-heard,
Above the flowerbed, over the lawn . . .
A flashing dip, and it is gone,
And all it lends to the eye is this —
A sunbeam giving the air a kiss.

TELL ALL THE WORLD

TELL all the world that summer's here again
With song and joy; tell them, that they may know
How, on the hillside, in the shining fields
New clumps of violets and daisies grow.

Tell all the world that summer's here again,
That white clouds voyage through a sky so still
With blue tranquillity, it seems to hang
One windless tapestry, from hill to hill.

Tell all the world that summer's here again:
Folk go about so solemnly and slow,
Walking each one his grooved and ordered way —
I fear that, otherwise thev will not know!

WIND-MAGIC

THE wind sweeps over the corn,
The wind sweeps over my heart,
It lifts me up and it blows
My soul and body apart;

And I run, I run by its side
In bodiless liberty —
I touch the tops of the trees,
And dapple and darken the sea;

I rush through populous streets,
I eddy through glade and glen —
And now the wind dies down,
And I am my body again.

THE CHANTEY OF THE GALILEAN FISHERMEN

WHILE the hills of Galilee hung as in a sea of glass,
Peter, Andrew, James, and John, when they saw the Dreamer pass,
With the clouts that they had on, left their nets' live, tangled mass —

Left the fishes where they lay, seething silver, on the sand.
Zebedee in vain, in vain raised his clenched, protesting hand,
Captain of the fisher-fleet, twelve brown sails at his command.

Thrice the Man had talked with them at the quiet edge of day,
Where his dozen, sail-stripped masts, rocking slow, at anchor lay,
But he'd never even dreamed He would lure his sons away!

John was he who sang so well when the battling nets they drew;
Peter'd hook leviathan just to fetch a nearer view;
James could row, and Andrew mend — four, the best men of his crew!

"O, my sons, what fools you are," cried their father Zebedee,
"To go running off like this — when you're sure of work with me —
With a Man who boasts a ship on a far, untravelled sea!"

"Yes, you're fools," a gossip said, "fools to leave your father so —
Leave the ships you've learned to sail and the nets you've learned to throw,
On the word a Stranger gives of a Way you do not know."

"Oh," said Peter, "we don't care to what unknown port we sail.
When all other craft lie deep, whelmed in foam from rail to rail,
Captain swears no better ship ever keeled along the gale."

"Oh, the ship that waits for us," it was gentle Andrew said,
"It will weather any storm, Captain says, that ship bestead,
Though the stars stoop down and whirl by the lifted mainmast head."

"Oh, we've signed on, father dear, with a greater
Shipman now,
For to cast a world-wide net from a starry
vessel's prow,"
Spoke up John, while sunset lay like a halo on
his brow.

James said nothing, only laughed, the Adventure
in his face.
They departed as the stars lit illimitable space.
All the neighbours said such sons were a scandal
and disgrace.

CHANT OF THE WIDOW'S MITE

LISTEN to the trumpets blowing before
The pharisee deep in the Talmud's lore
Proclaiming his generous gifts to the Lord
With the sky itself as his sounding board.

Behold the scribe with his pompous face
Saluting his friends in the market place.

See how the strutting rich man comes
The lord of vineyards and silks and sums.

Behold the king in his chariot ride
Surrounded by spears on every side. . . .

But the widow, the widow comes last of all
And she lets the mites in the coin-box fall
So hardly spared from her little hoard —
Unseen of men, but seen of the Lord!

Who gives from his utmost need shall gain
What the poor earth's measure cannot contain. . . .
The king and all his hosts go by.
The pharisee's trumpets hush their cry.

The scribe sees death as all men must,
And the rich man's wealth grows less than dust:
But out of the widow's humble deed
There grows, like the Scriptural mustard seed,
Mercy and pity and love's increase
To wax till the world itself shall cease.

THE GOING OF HIS FEET

HIS feet went here and there
About the common earth.
He touched to grandeur all
Men held of little worth.

He loved the growing flowers,
The small bright singing birds,
The patient flocks of sheep,
The many-pastured herds,

The field of rippling corn
That shimmered in the sun,
The soft blue smoke of eve
That curled when day was done. . . .

He did not search a-far
For what He had to say:
His mind reached forth and drew
Its strength from every day:

The struggling nets, alive
With fish drawn from the sea
Supplied Him with the apt
And chosen simile. . . .

He saw a neighbour build
  A house that did not stand —
And men may not forget
  The House Upon The Sand;

He saw a widow drop
  Her mite into the hoard —
And to eternity
  That treasure is up-stored;

He heard a publican
  Who thought none other there —
The souls of all mankind
  Are richer for that prayer. . . .

O, Poet of The World,
  I pray Thee, come to me,
That my lame heart might walk,
  That my dark soul may see;

And teach me, too, to go
  About the ways of earth
And find the Wealth of God
  In things of little worth!

LAZARUS SPEAKS

LAZARUS, come forth!" The Great Compeller
spoke,
Then, earthquake-rent, the grave-mouth heaved
and broke,
And vomited forth, and pushed out, as with hands,
A reeling thing wrapped round in rotten
bands. . . .

"Why didst thou call me forth?' moaned
Lazarus,
"Why hast thou dragged my soul back earth-
ward, thus?
Why didst thou waken me from out death's deep
And sweet oblivion, sweeter far than sleep?
What have I done to merit this? . . .
Now I
A second time must die!

Oh, Mighty Lord, how can I shake from me
Those once-touched edges of eternity? —
Now, as I walk the narrow village street,
Mine ears will hear all mouths repeat,
'There goes the Twice-born; him Jehovah led
Twice into life — behold The Living Dead!'
How can I cleanse me from the sepulchre?
Will not about me grave-scents ever stir?
Dare I sit down in Life's thronged banquet-room,
An odor from the tomb?

My mouth, too, thou hast sealed . . . I may
not tell
The things I've learned of Paradise and Hell,
And unto me the reverend Wise will come
Across the deserts both of sand and foam
To learn of me what men have ever sought —
And I must, silent, sit, and tell them naught.

The children at the fountain will grow dumb
When they behold me come;
The wedding guests will hold their laughter gay
Till I have slunk my way;
Without the door of Joy I'll have to wait
Like a foul leper at the city gate;
The very birds will cease till I have passed, —
And I will be to all an icy blast.

Each word I say and every thought I have
Will reek with reminiscence of the grave;
And I shall live, abhorred, among men —
Dear Master, give me back to Death again!"

Thus Lazarus spake, when, stunned with sun
and bloom,
He groped forth, like a blind man, from the tomb....

Then with that love which storms beyond all speech
And floods the soul through every cove and reach,
Christ took one groping hand . . . he answered
naught. . . .
But down his cheeks the human tears rained hot.

THE ANGEL'S ANTHEM

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

THERE was music on the hillside and singing in the glen,
And anthems heard in meadows when Christ was born to men:

The king slept on in blindness, though troubled in his sleep;
The high priest's ancient wisdom held no such lore in keep;

The trader and the merchant so bound by gain and rule,
And all the learned scholars who founded school on school,

The consul and the soldiers, their ears were stopped that night,
And only to the shepherds the angels brought delight. . . .

The shepherds heard the singing that charmed the listening air;
The shepherds saw the glory; the shepherds were aware:

There was music on the hillside and singing in the glen,
And anthems heard in meadows when Christ was born to men!

THE UNREPENTANT THIEF

THE Unrepentant Thief clung to the Cross,
Batlike — he held Christ's Paradise no loss:

Point him as chief example, if you will,
Of darkened souls that perish loving ill, —

At least, — struck blind with fear, he did not cower
And supplicate for heaven that last hour.

A RHYME OF TWO WAYFARERS

TWO travellers met in passing, and one was lost in the murk:
"Tell me (I come from Nazareth seeking carpenter work)
Is this the road to Jerusalem?"

"You're somewhat out of the way.
A furlong to the left, sire, brings you to Golgotha,
Then turn along the hillside — a path leads to the street
Where three men loom on crosses with nails clenched through the feet."

THE PLAYMATE

CHILDREN

Where has he gone, our playmate?
We've sought him high and low
Where grey-green olives ripen,
Where haycocks stand a-row. . . .

ELDERS

We saw him passing down the street
An hour or so ago!

CHILDREN

Where has he gone, our comrade
Who took us by the hand
And taught us to build houses
With little heaps of sand?

ELDERS

He has gone forth to sojourn
In a far, foreign land!

CHILDREN

Nay, but he would not leave us
Who took us on his knee,
And set our fancies sailing
Like ships upon the sea. . . .

ELDERS

We think that he will never come
Again to Galilee!

A CHANTEY OF GROWING GREEN THINGS

And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree. — REVELATIONS
The little green leaves were kind to him. — LANIER

YE shall not hurt the grass of the earth
That grows so gently on down and hill —
When I had nowhere to lay my head
The lush green couch of it held me still,

And I blessed the softness of the grass
And the grateful shade of the wayside tree
On the highway to Jerusalem
And down the roads of Galilee.

The live oak shadowed me from the sun,
The sycamore and the lonely pine
Tented me off from the chill of dew
In the long night vigils that were mine.

There was never a green thing did me hurt
Though I suffered much from the ills of men,
So I love the lily of the vale,
And the little flowers of field and fen;
And even that barren fig I cursed
I afterward bade it bloom again

Till it bore like a tree in paradise. . . .
  Yea, even the thorns they pressed on me
Grew rich with roses budded thick
  To make their mute apology,

And sent a tender green about."
  The angels bowed in a shining row,
And all earth's things of growing green,
  They heard the master and they bent low:

And when Death came to tether Life,
  Leading it to its great, dark End,
The trees and the flowers sang in the dawn
  For the Lord of All, was He not their friend?

THE RHYME OF THE PRODIGAL

YOU'VE youth and a girl and plenty of gold,
what more can your heart desire? —
Did it ever content the heart of youth to sit
at home by the fire?
I am leaving half my land to you and half of my
flocks and herds —
And I'd rather shepherd alien sheep and live
on whey and curds.
Don't go, don't go, my own little son, and
leave me all alone —
Will you never remember I'm not a child but a
youth that's nigh man-grown?
Think of your brother, your elder brother, —
would you leave him all to bear? —
He's only a brother of mine by birth who
seldom speaks me fair,
And I've had a dream, a wonderful dream of
brothers that wait for me,
Men made brethren by perils borne together on
land and sea.
Think of your mother, your own dear mother,
and ponder what is best. —
Would you tie me fast to an apron-string and
make me a village jest?
Your pallet is fine and soft with wool and you
sleep in the Upper Room —
And I'd liefer be in a fo'c'sle hold where one
lamp swings in the gloom,

In the fo'c'sle hold of a great-sailed ship that sunders the purple sea.
My son, my son, will you break my heart to have your jest with me? —
Father, I'm having no jest with you, but I'm earnest to go away;
There's something that's gripping the soul of me that will not bide delay;
I have dreamed and dreamed for nights of seas that break in alien foam
And of magic cities that climb and climb with dome on golden dome
And I'd rather be a beggar that crawls along some strange, far street
Than living here where I rise each day to sit in the selfsame seat,
To look in the face that is always the same at the stale, familiar board,
What though the granaries burst with corn and the wine-jar brims to be poured!
My lad, I see that you won't be moved, so here is your father's hand,
And whenever you tire of ships and ports and yearn for the good home-land,
Wearied to death of the waves that toss forever and ever about,
Come home, so ragged the dogs forget, — and you'll find the latchstring out!

THE RHYME OF THE ELDER BROTHER

I AM the Elder Brother; you've heard of the Prodigal Son,
But little of me, I'll warrant, who stuck till the job was done,
While he was off carousing at Caesarea and Tyre
With dissolute dancing women to sound of tabour and lyre.
I am the Elder Brother; I brought the sheep to the fold
When, spite of the wool he carried, the black ram shivered with cold,
When frost gleamed white on the roof-tops as thick as a fall of snow
And the great, pale star of evening shone like a lamp hung low.
I am the Elder Brother; I worked till far in the night
To see that the cows were foddered and the horses bedded right;
The Boy, he took his portion and scattered it far and near, —
But I held on to my wages to buy more farming-gear,
And I looked about for a woman, and married, and settled down
And kept so busy I've only gone twice of a year to town.

I am the Elder Brother; when HE came strolling back
I strove to send him packing to follow his former track,
Yes, I who had heaved and lifted along with the other men,
I urged the Old Man blackly to let him shift again. . . .
And ever I grew bitter to see that the right was done
To me, the Elder Brother *in re* the Prodigal Son,
And each plea knotted me harder, I stood as firm as a rock —
Till one day down in the village I heard a Young Man talk
(A queer young chap from somewhere . . . folk said from Galilee)
Of God . . . and Love . . . and Brothers . . . and He seemed to speak to me
As He told of the lost sheep straying far from the wonted track, —
For only that day, a fortnight, I brought one in on my back,
And I hadn't stopped to chide it, but I had carried it in —
And I saw I'd treated it better than my own blood and kin;

And I went back home, and was decent, and joined the lad at the fire
And I even enjoyed his stories, though I knew he was half a liar! . . .
But I'd like to know what happened to the Lad who was young as he,
Who talked so plainly to people that He only spoke to me!

A FANTASY OF HEAVEN

PERHAPS he plays with cherubs now,
Those little, golden boys of God,
Bending, with them, some silver bough,
The while a seraph, head a-nod,

Slumbers on guard; how they will run
And shout, if he should wake too soon, —
As fruit more golden than the sun
And riper than the full-grown moon,

Conglobed in clusters, weighs them down,
Like Atlas heaped with starry signs;
And, if they're tripped, heel over crown,
By hidden coils of mighty vines, —

Perhaps the seraph, swift to pounce,
Will hale them, vexed, to God — and He
Will only laugh, remembering, once
He was a boy in Galilee!

HIGHWAYMAN'S SONG

THERE'S a smell of burning wood in the air
  That comes with the turning year,
The road unwinds in a silver coil
  As the autumn moon rides clear
Of a patch of cloud, — and there, etched sheer,
  Swings the coach, through a burst of light. . . .
O, a harvest of Louis D'or is ours,
A flood of golden sovereigns is ours
  If we screw our courage tight;
With a heigh and a ho
As we rob 'em so
  In the gaze of the great, white moon, —
Though every thief has his piece of rope,
Every thief has his piece of rope
  That hangs him, late or soon.
Now there isn't a game in all the earth
  That only one can play;
The blackest of crimes needs fellowship
  To hearten or gainsay, —
And we are rollicking, singing lads,
  Although we'll get for our pains
A gibbet on a bleak cross-road
  To swing on the wind in chains. . . .
O, the stage draws near and the moon rides clear
  As we wait where the shadows lurk, —
And, bursting forth, we make 'em stand,
All in a row we make 'em stand
  With many a jest and quirk,

As with heigh and ho
We rob 'em so
  In the gaze of the great, white moon,
Though every thief has his piece of rope,
Every thief has his piece of rope
  That hangs him, late or soon.

THE MADMAN

I HAD a vision in the night:
That vast mysterious something,
That which hangs imminent in orchestras,
That thing which every human heart expects,
I dreamed had happened to me;
Sometimes I felt it hanging over me
Like the shadow
Of enormous catastrophe,
And then again it was the liberation
From everything,
The unpremeditated event
That hovers, infinite, over every man. . . .

No, it is not death,
Nor love,
Nor fame, success, nor wealth:
These are but paltry things,
The sparrow's wing before the archangel's flight. . . .

Day after day I felt that it would happen
Of which all mankind feel the imminence
As Christians dream a great, red Judgment Day
And dip their lives into its dreadful color. . . .

And now it must have happened
To me, at last;
The rosy nakedness of immortality,
Or something kin to that,
Has fallen over me:
I am all ecstacy,
And cannot give it words. . . .

And yet they lead me off,
One upon either side,
Saying that I am mad!

THE DEAD LOVER

I AM out here in the rain;
O, my love, let me in
And tomorrow the parson
Will shrive us of sin.

O, woe's me, my love,
There's a man with you there,
With his mouth on your mouth
And his hand on your hair;

And you're happy, and laugh, —
And the lamplight glows red. . . .
So soon I'm forgotten
I think I am dead!

THE DISEMBODIED

INVISIBLE, yet real as air, —
My instant foot is everywhere.
The cold's sharp lash no more may sting
Nor darkness bid me fold my wing.
Earth cumbrance of the five-fold sense
Has widened to omniscience.
Swifter than hope my foot can race
Unto the other side of space,
And I may see from where I stand
God poise creation in his hand:
Worlds flash and glow like firefly light,
The shadow of his face their night;
And now I glimpse his dawning smile
Light up a bank of suns the while.

TRUTH AND LIE

AFTER THE PERSIAN

HE who loves the truth must have
Ever at hand a saddled steed
To serve his instant need.

He who thinks the truth must keep
His foot into the stirrup thrust
Lest he be ground to dust.

He who speaks the truth must grow
Wings back of either arm
To lift him high from harm. . . .

But he who lives the lie has need
Of neither stirrup, steed,
Nor wings about his head —
For he's already dead!

THE BOOTH OF HAPPINESS

THERE was once an unhappy man
  Who had a bazaar in the east
Where he carved little ivory toys
  Of elephant, god, and priest.

The children gathered and gaped,
  And lovers paused as they went:
There were crystal dwarfs with staves
  And grotesque images pent

In beryl and chrysolite;
  There were tumblers poising a fan;
And here was a bird, and there
  A bear that danced with a man. . . .

The man bent low in his booth
  Plying and plying his trade
To bury the woes of his life
  In the queer little toys he made;

And the people bought and bought,
  The street was full of their press—
And they named the man's bazaar
  "The Booth Of Happiness!"

UNNUMBERED WORLDS

UNNUMBERED worlds flash round unnumbered suns:
World-generations battle, labour, cease,
And millions go down to the final peace
Through all the Starry Vast, while on there runs
Fierce generation still, and little ones
Clap tiny palms on million mothers' knees —
Themselves to toil and strive till death's release
And from their loins pour newer millions.
From time to time all Space doth halt and cry
On Thee, O Life, — for it would gladly know
Whence they have come and whither they must go —
Then a star falls, and silence gives reply. . . .
No answer else! — and Nature trudges on
With death and life and sunset, night and dawn.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

IT is vacant in the daylight,
  There is nothing living there.
But at night the foot of Something
  Goes up and down the stair.

There's a fence of rusted pickets;
  In the yard the tangled grass
Clutches at the feet in warning:
  Every pane's a shattered glass;

On a plot where burst a fountain
  Prone a marble naiad lies
Staring up in sun or starshine
  With unseeing, soulless eyes;

Ancient weeds have choked the flowers
  That in patterned order stood;
Step by step with sure encroachment,
  Marches in the gloomy wood. . . .

It is vacant in the daylight,
  There is nothing living there;
For at night the foot of SOMETHING
  Goes up and down the stair.

THE BALLAD OF THE LIVING DEAD

I THOUGHT that when I struck him down,
  Why, that would be the end
Of him who stole my Love away,
  That false, betraying friend.

I gave him no time for a prayer
  And no space for a priest. . . .
I flung him over in the moat
  To make the fishes' feast.

Yet, even as I turned away
  And thought, "now all is well,"
A night-thing sent a doleful cry
  Like a far voice from hell!

They searched for many a torch-lit night,
  For many a windy day
Till a peasant said he'd seen him go
  As he had ridden away. . . .

Full loud I laughed . . . but when I saw
  The stable open wide,
I feared the Dead who would not die,—
  His horse was not inside.

Then came my woman he had won,
  Saying, "your ring of worth
He took, last night. Behold, no more
  It holds my finger's girth. . . ."

O, worse than death the look he gave,
  And none the words he said
When the slain man returned, one night,
  And stood beside my bed. . . .

I sent for the sad, grey, silent priest,
  And, as he harked to me,
Horror rose in his face like the dawn
  Over a still, grey sea:

Alas, alas, I've learned too late
  Now that my days are sped
That strike with daggers all you may,
  The Dead will not lie dead. . . .

And I hear them building all day long
  And far into the night
A tall thing with a dangling rope
  Upon a sky-black height.

THE GAME WARDEN'S SON

FATHER, O father, what have you done
With Ruddy Kervil, the Warden's son?
— He has gone forth under the sky
To watch the young grey goshawks fly.

O father, father, what have you done
With the Game Warden's only son?
— He has gone forth to fish for me
Where the bitter marsh runs black to the sea.

O father, my father, what have you done
With a grey-faced woman's only son?
— He has gone forth to hunt, alone,
The deer that drink by Yarbury Stone.

My father, my father, what have you done
With my own lover, the Warden's son?
— By Yarvel Mere is a track of red. . . .
And the crows are gathering overhead.

THE BETRAYAL

THERE were miles and miles of still, grey heath
Where never a wind did run,
And there was a great cloud in the sky
Red with the sinking sun,

And the tufts of grass stood black and high
With the sun's last edge behind,
While a small grey bird slipped through the air
Like a dream from a madman's mind.

Then, far away, a trumpet shrilled
Like the cry of a new-born child,
And I saw the little moving stars
Of their spearheads tossing wild. . . .

"What voices are those, my own dear love?"
"Tis the waves of the sea that roar!"
"Nay, we are miles and miles away
From the sea and the good sea's shore,

Where the hermit dwells who will make us one,
Where I fear we never shall win!"
I leaned above the horse's mane
And I drove the rowels in. . . .

"I think I hear my father's voice."
"Tis a bittern from yonder mere!"
Then an arrow sped high overhead, —
It whistled high and clear,

And after it leaped her father's voice,
"Light down, light down like a man,
And fight with any one of us. . . .
You have broken the law of the clan!"

"Nay, heed them not," my true love spoke,
"I have broken the law of the clan,
An ancient law, and a cruel law —
But they've called me, man to man, —

Yet how could they know the way of our flight,
The way of our flight so soon?
For as yet the sky is dark with the lack
Of the still unrisen noon. . . .

Sir Hugh is the only knight that knows,
A friend both tried and true!" —
Then I saw in the front, by her father's side,
That traitor and thief, Sir Hugh!

"I have twenty knights will cleave your skull,
Oh, stealer of women so bold!"
"There is only one knight I would slay in fight —
The bloodless thief that told!"

With that her father laughed a laugh
And smote Sir Hugh on the knee. . . .
"You were quick to tell . . . by the bottom of
Hell,
Be as quick to fight!" quo' he.

We couched our spears as the bright moon rose;
  We fought right lustily, —
I found him brave as he was false,
  Right false and brave was he;

But I caught him at last with a sudden blast
  Of blows on the head and breast,
And I tore away his morion
  With a tug at the helmet's crest. . . .

His still grey face shone white in the moon,
  His still grey face shone white
As I knelt by his side before he died,
  There in the still grey night. . . .

"Sir Hugh that was my life-long friend
  Beneath both moon and sun,
O, why have you done the foulest deed
  That ever friend has done?"

"Lean down, lean down right secretly,
  As once you held me dear,
For the thing that I would tell to you
  No other man must hear:

You knew all things I thought or knew, —
  One thing you did not know;
The thing that I hid from you in my heart
  That brings us both to woe. . . ."

Lower I leaned in the low red grass
To hear the words he sighed
From his death-slow lips, "I loved her too,
God . . . knows!" so my false friend died.

HE DID NOT KNOW

He did not know that he was dead:
He walked along the crowded street,
Smiled, tipped his hat, nodded his head
To friends he chanced to meet, —

And yet they passed him quietly by
With an unknowing, level stare;
They met him with an abstract eye
As if he were the air.

"Some sorry thing has come to pass,"
The Dead Man thought . . . he hurried home
And found his wife before the glass
Dallying with a comb. . . .

He found his wife all dressed in black;
He kissed her mouth . . . he stroked her head. . . .
"Men act so strange since I've come back
From over there," he said.

She said no word . . . she only smiled;
But now he heard her speak his name,
And saw her study, grief-beguiled,
His picture in a frame. . . .

Then he remembered that black night
And the great shell-burst wide and red. . . .
The sudden plunging into light —
And knew that he was dead!

THE FIDDLER

WHY, upon this lovely day,
Must that wretched fiddler play, —
All the sky one stainless blue, —
Every note he strikes, untrue! . . .
Summer deep embowered in flowers,
Silent music in the hours,
In the east a feather moon, —
And — that fiddler out of tune!
God's hand never slipped to mar
At the making of a star;
There's no true excuse yet made
For the bungler at his trade!

STREET LAMPS

GREENWICH VILLAGE

SOFTLY they take their being, one by one,
From the lamp-lighter's hand, after the sun
Has dropped to dusk . . . like little flowers they
bloom
Set in long rows amid the growing gloom. . . .

Who he who lights them is, I do not know,
Except that, every eve, with footfall slow
And regular, he passes by my room
And sets his gusty flowers of light a-bloom.

A POET'S ROOM

GREENWICH VILLAGE 1912

I HAVE a table, cot and chair
And nothing more. The walls are bare
Yet I confess that in my room
Lie Syrian rugs rich from the loom,
Stand statues poised on flying toe,
Hang tapestries with folk a-flow
As the wind takes them to and fro.
And workman Fancy has inlaid
My walls with ivory and jade.

Though opening on a New York street
Full of cries and hurryng feet
My window is a faery space
That gives on each imagined place;
Old ruins lost in desert peace;
The broken fanes and shrines of Greece;
Aegean islands fringed with foam;
The everlasting tops of Rome;
Troy flowing red with skyward flame,
And every spot of hallowed fame.

Outside my window I can see
The sweet blue lake of Galilee,
And Carmel's purple-regioned height
And Sinai clothed with stars and night.

But this is told in confidence,
So not a word when you go hence,
For if my landlord once but knew
My attic fetched so large a view,
The churl would never rest content
Till he had raised the monthly rent.

FAREWELL

TELL them, O Sky-born, when I die
With high romance to wife,
That I went out as I had lived,
Drunk with the joy of life.

Yea, say that I went down to death
Serene and unafraid,
Still loving Song, but loving more
Life, of which Song is made!

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